

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 1824

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: LI, SHUM, PINS, PINT, PORG, EAID, EFIN

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN LIBERIA - SUMMARY

REF: STATE 45319

1. TELEGRAPHIC SUMMARY.

LIBERIA'S CONSTITUTION ON PAPER PROVIDES LIBERIAN CITIZENS IMPRESSIVE PROTECTION FOR THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS. CONSTITUTION AND ITS INCORPORATED BILL OF RIGHTS WERE CLOSELY MODELLED ON U.S. COUNTERPARTS AND INCLUDE FREEDOM OF RELIGION, ASSEMBLY, SPEECH, PRESS; FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY AND SEARCH WITHOUT WARRANT; AND RIGHTS TO TRIAL BY JURY, TO DUE PROCESS, TO BEAR ARMS, TO VOTE AND TO HABEUS CORPUS. CONSTITUTION IS FAR FROM PERFECT HUMAN-RIGHTS DOCUMENT, HOWEVER. IT LIMITS CITIZENSHIP TO "NEGROES AND PERSONS OF NEGRO DESCENT", AND, TOGETHER WITH OTHER LEGISLATIVE ENACTMENTS, LEAVES AMBIGUOUS WHETHER TRIBAL MAJORITY ENJOYS CITIZENSHIP STATUS. SITUATION IN PRACTICE DIFFERS CONSIDERABLY FROM WHAT CONSTITUTION PROVIDES. A SERIES OF EMERGENCY POWERS ACTS AND SEDITION LAWS LIMIT THE LEGAL PROTECTIONS AFFORDED BY CONSTITUTION. A STRONG EXECUTIVE DOMINATES THIS ONE-PARTY STATE AND FREQUENTLY SWEEPS ASIDE CONSIDERATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN INDIVIDUAL CASES WHICH ARE PERCEIVED TO THREATEN EITHER THE REGIME'S STABILITY OR THE PERSONAL INTERESTS OF THE POLITICAL ELITE. MAJORITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS INFRINGEMENTS OCCUR IN FOLLOWING AREAS:

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FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY (ARTICLE 20), EXPRESSION OF SPEECH AND

PRESS (ARTICLE 19), ASSOCIATION (ARTICLE 20, 23), GENUINE ELECTIONS (ARTICLES 19, 21), AND FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION (ARTICLE 9) OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. INSTANCES OF CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT AND PROLONGED DETENTION WITHOUT CHARGES DO EXIST, BUT ARE NOT WIDESPREAD. IT CANNOT, HOWEVER, BE SAID THAT VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE WIDESPREAD, SYSTEMATIC, OR CONSISTENT.

2. ILO COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS HAS CRITICIZED GOL SINCE 1973 FOR SEVERAL PROVISIONS OF LIBERIAN LAW WHICH STAND IN CONTRAVENTION TO SOME OF THE ILO CONVENTIONS. CRITICISM CENTERS AROUND PROVISIONS OF LAW WHICH PROHIBIT ORGANIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS BY INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNIONS AND PERMIT FORMS OF FORCED LABOR. EMBASSY HAS DISCUSSED THESE SECTIONS OF LAW WITH GOL OFFICIALS. GOL IS CURRENTLY DRAFTING REVISION OF LABOR LAW UNDER GUIDANCE OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY TEAM. NEW LABOR LAW, IF ENACTED, SHOULD REMOVE, AT LEAST ON PAPER, THESE VIOLATIONS.

3. AIRGRAM FOLLOWS.
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